We write to you as grassroots organisations and groups that continue to work diligently to mitigate, inform, and support the public to protect themselves and stop the spread of COVID-19.

We write with concern that your event will take place soon with no discernible policy on protecting your participants against the spread of COVID-19. This is especially worrying as we are about to enter into yet another COVID-19 summer spike of infections as a result of the NB.1.8.1 (Nimbus) strain that has already gripped Singapore and Hong Kong and is spreading globally. For the past five summers, COVID-19 has already provided enough evidence to show that this **is not** a seasonal virus, relegated to only autumn and winter, but that COVID-19 infection spikes happen year round and almost every summer. For context, view more here.

Facts about COVID-19

In the 5 years of this on-going pandemic, over 400,000 studies in reputable journals have shown COVID-19 to be a virus more severe than the flu. Covid-19 is an airborne, multi-system, multi-organ disease that is shown to cause **significant organ damage, even if you have a mild or asymptomatic infection**. A large-scale study published in 2024 conducted by a network of global clinical research networks found that in hospitalised patients, 70% in high income countries and 42% in middle to low-income countries suffer from long COVID, a post-COVID-19 syndrome that currently has no cure and no specific treatment. You do not need to be hospitalised as a result of a COVID-19 infection to be likely to succumb to long COVID. Long COVID affects people indiscriminately. The idea that only old and disabled people are primarily affected by long COVID has been proven false. We are increasingly seeing healthy people, including children, young adults, and young US marines, with no previous health problems become disabled by long COVID. Specifically in children, the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) indicates that,

"Long COVID can affect any child, ***even if they had mild or no symptoms*** *when they had COVID-19. Long COVID is common, affecting up to 10% to 20% of children with a history of COVID-19. With almost 6 million US children potentially affected, this is* ***higher than the number of children with asthma****, the most common chronic health problem in children."*

In a recent study published in *Brain, Behaviour, Immunity*, scientists at the University of Otago in New Zealand investigated the cognitive effects of COVID-19 infection in a population of undergraduate university students. What they found was concerning.

- 40% of undergraduate students reported brain fog due to COVID-19.
- 37% of undergraduates exhibited impaired cognition up to 17 months post-infection.

- Brain fog appeared to affect the distinct prefrontal haemodynamic patterns- i.e.: the brain region crucial for higher cognitive functions like memory, decision-making, and executive control.

Studies on long COVID have been done in Kashmir and Nigeria and the rest of the Global South to illustrate the global nature of this growing problem.

COVID-19 as an Occupational Disease and Chronic Disability

As of November 2024, 50 countries have recognised that COVID-19 is an occupational disease. We have read of NHS health professionals contracting repeat Covid-19 infections in their wards as a result of a lack of COVID-safe mitigating procedures like the normalisation of respiratory masks (FFP2/N95) and clean air hygiene from HEPA air purifiers. Due to this chronic lack of protections, health professionals who have become too unwell to work due to long COVID are often forced to leave their profession. Not only does this affect the livelihood of an increasing number of workers, it also contributes to the deterioration of an already precarious healthcare system.

A chronic disability like long COVID means that many people find themselves house- and/or bed-bound, unable to carry on their daily lives, and isolated from their friends, family and community. This goes both for those who have become disabled by long COVID and those who are immunocompromised and forced to isolate in order to stay alive. We are increasingly witnessing the complete erosion of good hygiene and preventative health. A fascism is growing that is laced with virulent anti-vaccine falsehoods, while mask-bans becoming normalised in many parts of the United States. These issues underscore what happens when we let these **falsehoods and ableist policies become normalised**. Meanwhile, in the UK we have a Labour government that is actively making disabled peoples' lives harder to live with dignity and safety. A recent piece in the Big Issue spoke to four people in the UK, part of the 2 million who are disabled by long COVID, on their fears of Labour's continued austerity policy on disabled people. As Lisa comments,

"They keep harping on about disabled people: 'We need to get them back to work. We need to cut the benefits.' ***However, you're closing long Covid clinics all over the UK. You're not ensuring that the NHS is educating professionals to treat us.*** *If we're not getting treated, how are we going to get off benefits? How are we going to get back to work?"*

Downplaying the damaging effects of COVID-19

The closure of long COVID clinics in nation-wide, something that Lisa points to, is a dangerous policy that harms the development of better treatment for children and adults who have long COVID. Whether under the Conservatives or Labour, the government's policy has been to sweep COVID-19 under the rug. We saw this clearly in 2022 when free lateral flow tests (LFTs) were discontinued in April during the start of the cost of living crisis. This means that less people are tested for COVID-19 because of costs associated with purchasing LFTs, making it difficult to track the virus in the community. Also in 2022, wastewater testing in England ended.

There have been public attempts to bring back COVID-19 wastewater testing for England, to no avail. The decision to end both free LFTs and wastewater testing for COVID-19 illustrate how the UK government and media alike have positioned Covid-19 as something in the distant past (i.e. post-Covid) and treating it akin to the flu. Unlike the flu, even just one "mild" COVID-19 infection can potentially lead to multi-organ damage, long COVID, and an increased risk for heart attacks and stroke. Health professionals and scientists have been warning the public about an increased global population with dysregulated, weakened immune systems due to the unsustainable rate at which people are being re-infected with COVID-19 multiple times a year. It is also not surprising that we are witnessing a huge rise in disability in the UK since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-safety and the Swiss Cheese Model

It is for all these reasons outlined that we strongly urge you to adopt measures to make your events as COVID-safe as possible. What does COVID safety look like? It would mean using the Swiss Cheese Model of preventing infectious disease that includes:

- HEPA air purifiers and/or Corsi-Rosenthal boxes (CR boxes) are used at your event to ensure a ready supply of clean filtered air from viruses and other pollutants. Good ventilation is essential to reduce airborne transmission of COVID and other pathogens. **The risk of transmission increases in poorly ventilated spaces**. Carbon dioxide acts as a proxy for ventilation and keeping it below 800 parts per million reduces the risk of airborne transmission. In addition to good ventilation, filtering the air reduces the risk of transmission even further.

- Require attendees to wear FFP2/N95/KN94 masks whether indoors or outdoors. In the US, the Socialism conference has a clear COVID-19 policy and attendees are **required to wear** either a N95 or KN95 mask while indoors and in certain outdoor talks. Since 2022 the Socialism conference has observed this policy with no problems.

- Urging attendees to stay home if unwell to minimise the transmission of COVID-19 and/or any other illness (norovirus, flu, and other viruses). While we would encourage people to test regularly using lateral flow tests (LFTs), we also recognise that as the COVID-19 virus continues to transform, LFTs are missing a substantial number of people who are asymptomatic, i.e. having no noticeable symptoms of a Covid-19 infection. It is for this reason why we strongly encourage the use of air purifiers (HEPA or CR boxes) to ensure a ready flow of clean air indoors and wearing FFP2/N95/KN94 respirator masks for events.

- Encouraging your event to hold workshops and talks outdoors (weather permitting).

- Holding parallel online sessions for those who want to take part in your event but cannot because of disability and/or cost of travel and accommodation in London.

Utilising the Swiss Cheese Model of infectious disease control shows how when **all methods are used together**, **the risk of infection is greatly reduced**. We realised that the information provided might be daunting. You do not have to do this work alone. We are here to help your event organisers create a sustainable COVID-19 policy and answer any logistical questions around COVID-safety. There are UK Mask Bloc groups available to help source FFP2 respirator masks for your event. The Corsi-Rosenthal Foundation UK, Smart Air, and the Greater Manchester Hazards Centre are valuable resources that you can use for air purifier loans. Breathe Easy London and Breathe Easy Sheffield organise regular COVID-safer events and would be good to contact for suggestions on how to run your event as COVID-safe as possible. Lastly, since the start of the pandemic, Buckinghamshire Disability Service (BuDS) has provided weekly COVID-19 risk assessment reports that helps track an impending COVID infection wave. We want to remind our comrades that the work of these groups is often done by disabled people on a voluntary capacity. They deserve our support and solidarity.

By practicing robust COVID-safety, your event can bring in people that have been isolated, excluded and forgotten by the government and by their communities, and affirm spaces that refuse to let this disease disable more of our comrades.

Signed by the following organisations:

Act 4 Long Covid

Brighton Cov Connections

Breathe Easy London

Breathe Easy Sheffield

Clean Air Hampshire

Crips Against Cuts

Edinburgh Mask Bloc

Glasgow Mask Bloc

Liverpool Mask Bloc

Manchester Mask Bloc

Masks For London

Unis Resist Border Controls (URBC) ***COVID-safety = migrant solidarity***